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### An Elegy to Broken Souls: Grief-stricken Recitals in '*RUINED*'

Abstract:

Lynn Nottage is the first female dramatist bagging Pulitzer award twice for her extraordinary and impeccable contribution in the field of literature. Nottage has always raised her voice through her plays whether I talk about her play *Sweat* depicting American dream, racism and plight of working class or *By the Way Meet Vera Stark* portraying an ordinary maid and her extraordinary aspirations. Set in civil war-torn Democratic Republic of Congo, '*Ruined*' is her very famous play which depicts the atrocities witnessed by Congolese. According to an American health care report in the year 2006-2007 around forty-eight thousand women were abducted and brutally molested by the soldiers and the rebels estimated twenty-six times higher than the United Nations report. The present article will explore the hidden grief and tears through the means of poetry recited in the play by a ruined and broken girl Sophie. Female section in a society is the foremost and easiest way to be victimized during wars as this section is fragile, vulnerable and easy to be targeted. Some women survivors had to suffer the most because they are sexually exploited first and then left with sexually transmitted diseases and sometimes unwanted forcible pregnancies too. Poems are the best way to express emotions. A number of poems on war have been written which express the grief, horror and futility of war. This play narrates the horrifying tales of women and children.

Keywords: Ruined, brothel, mutilated, haven

The play portrays a mining town in Democratic Republic of Congo where a bar cum brothel is run by Mama Nadi. She serves food, wine and girls to miners and soldiers as well. *Ruined* shows the horrifying facts about civil war where subjugation of women was on full swing. In *Ruined*, music has been introduced as a tool to reduce chaos and create peace of mind; maybe for a few moments. Sophie is another important character in the play who serves as a brilliant University education seeking girl who is a victim of even worse situations. She is seized by the rebels and mutilated after extreme sexual violence. Christian, the supplier of all the amenities like cigarettes, condoms, lipstick, chocolates, beer as well as the girls is very much interested to place Sophie in the brothel. He reveals that Sophie is his niece and according to Christian no other place than Mama's bar is safer for Sophie. Sophie becomes a part of the brothel. She sings in the bar and manages accounts as well.

In *Ruined*, songs play a great role to describe the deepened engraved grievance of women. Songs are being sung by the bar girls (especially by Sophie) frequently and depict the inner conflict and angst they are witnessing day and night. These girls have no right on their own life. They are very much dependent on will and mercy of Mama Nadi. Mama Nadi is the strongest character in the play who is bold, courageous and indomitable. Sophie is having a cuckoo like voice so her main job is here to sing and entertain lustful customers. Sophie has sung many songs in the play and her songs illustrate the predicament she undergoes like all other bar girls. So, music is the backbone of this play and performed intermittently.

The main task of Sophie is to entertain the customers. She has been placed in the bar to sing as she is not able to fulfil the sexual desires of the clients. Sophie in the very first song sings:

*The liquid night slowly pours in.*

*Languor peels away like a curtain.*

*Spirits rise, and tongues loosen*

*And the weary ask to be forgiven*

*You come here to forget,*

*You say drive away all regret.*

*And dance like it's ending*

*The ending of the war.*

Sophie is enticing and trying to create a lustful atmosphere by seducing the clients in the bar. Generally, she is welcoming the guests there in her song and asks them to forget about the pain and horrors of war. Sophie knows that these are the same people who assaulted and ruined her mercilessly. In this song she tells them that everyone here comes with a motive to forget the angst and miseries of war. She suggests them to leave the worries out of the bar and come here with a peace of mind. Here she also hints about the regrets; regrets of killing their own brothers; exploiting their own women; looting and despoiling own nation. In the last line she also suggests them of leaving behind the rage and revenge from own people.

Nottage represents songs and poems frequently to express the grief and anxiety witnessed by the girls in the bar. The songs are described in the play to release emotions. Their life is chaotic and devastated by the people around them. Every woman in the play is having her own tale of destruction and interprets her life in her own way.

Sophie sings frequently in the play and continues the impact of gothic atmosphere in surrounding.

*But can the music be all forgiving*

*Purge the wear and tear of the living?*

*Will the sound drown out your sorrow,*

*So you'll remember nothing tomorrow?*

*Have another beer my, friend,*

*Douse the fire of your fears, my friend,*

*Get drunk and foolish on the moment,*

*Brush aside the day's heavy judgement*

Sophie asks all the present soldiers that if they can forget and justify their sins. If they were ready to remorse for their misdeeds and the torture they had perpetrated on their own people. Here, Sophie warns them that as everyone knows that whatever they did, did for a wrong cause with wrong means; they know that doom's day come and they would not be spared for their misdeeds. Their crimes would be judgement on them for their sinful ways. But she wants them to drink, merry and leave the judgement on almighty.

In the very beginning of scene IV, Sophie recites another song:

A rare bird on a limb

Sings a song heard by a few.

A few patient and distant listeners.

Hear, its sweet call,

a sound that haunts the forest

A cry that tells a story,

harmonious, but time forgotten.

Sophie calls herself a rare, a unique kind of girl whose dream was never to be found in such a place. She was planning to go to university for pursuing graduation when she was abducted and mutilated after a heinous torture on her body and mind. Sophie represents herself as a distinctive type of person who never was made for this place. Her song is heard by these men in the bar, but they want her body and there is hardly anybody who wishes to listen to her melodious voice. She terribly needs to narrate her scornful recital to people around her, but none of them seems keen towards it. In further lines she sings that she never wants to be seen or caught by their sight and if it happens, she won't be able to live anymore. Sophie is badly injured by some of the rebels and now she is not in the position to make their lustful desires satisfied.

Act II, scene 1 expresses the horrendous circumstances of war:

*Hey, hey monsieur.*

*Come play, Monsieur,*

*The Congo sky rages electric,*

*As bullets fly like hell's rain,*

*Wild flowers wilt, and the forest decays.*

*But here we're pouring Champagne.*

Mama Nadi sings and escorts the visitors by greeting them in sensuous manner. She says that Congo is at high alert and everyone around is under threat of war all the time. But one should not surrender himself to the circumstances. Bullets can shoot anyone at any time, but one must forget the menace of death and destruction and be a part of this celebration of dance and drinks. Mama Nadi also expresses her regime in the bar.

*Cuz a warrior knows no peace,*

*When a hungry lion's awake.*

*But when that lion's asleep*

*The warrior is free to play.*

Mama Nadi and Sophie together sing and greet the guests there. Here they again mention war in the song and say that a warrior doesn't know the essence of peace; he's concerned about war only. They regard a warrior as hungry hunting lion who has come here not in the search of a deer, but for fulfilling his sexual desires.

Female section is everywhere treated as prestige of the house and once they are molested, they are thrown out of the house for blackening their name and blemishing their honour. Salima, Sophie and Josephine are the victims of prestige issue who are thrown out of their so-called haven. Concluding part ends up with a note of serene (if not happy) ending. Mama Nadi reveals about her own physically broken plight to Christian, but he still wants her in his life. Here Sophie again sings a song which shows an adieu to all the losses, sufferings and miseries. She recites:

*A branch lists to and fro,*

*An answer to the insurgent wind,*

*A circle dance, grace nearly broken*

*But it ends peacefully, stillness welcome.*

Sophie is elated as Mama Nadi has accepted Christian's proposal. She welcomes a new phase of life where she is expecting a new beginning after a horrendous chaos in their life. Here she talks about the ups and downs of life and how a storm of unfortunate happenings occurred and disappeared after a long struggle of survival. On a note of All's Well That End's Well she delivers her concluding words and aspires an ordinary life (worth to live) for all of them. Songs and Music is part and parcel in the play occurring regularly in many scenes depicting the circumstances and the real emotions of the characters. Songs in this play make a pivot role with the characters in the play.



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